

Great Hikes in Tennessee State Parks:

Hike Back in Time at Old Stone Fort

By Fran Wallas

You will want to spend the whole day learning about the history of the area around Old Stone Fort State Archaeological Park in Manchester, so plan to take the time to explore the trails and enjoy the scenic vistas.

The best place to start is the museum. The exhibits give the prehistory and history of this site's Native American cultural heritage. There are videos and displays about the archaeological significance of this National Historic Register site. There are trail maps and an informative booklet and guide.

When you leave the museum, walk up the hill and around to your right towards the entrance of the Native American ceremonial enclosure mound. Following the booklet, hike the easy trail clockwise for a mile and a quarter around the perimeter of the mound. You will get a feel for the site, the rock walls and the symmetrical waterfalls. Just as you get back to the museum building, turn left down the path and wood tie steps towards the sound of the water.

You may choose to explore any of the paths either above or below the earthen/rock walls, but the most scenic trails stay near the water of the Duck River. After the spillway dam, you come to Blue Hole Falls and then to Big Falls. Both of these sites provide a quiet place to sit, enjoy the bluffs, waterfalls, and solitude of the area.

Whatever way you hike, you will eventually rejoin the main trail blazed in white and the Hickerson and Wooten

paper mill built in 1879. The mill has stone walls and window openings that look out towards the river.

Continue on the main trail. Just past the bench at the trail junction, go right on the yellow Forks of the River Trail. Take another right at the arrow and you will be on the yellow Forks of the River Trail and the red Little Duck River Loop Trail. At the bottom of the hill along the river are Virginia Bluebells and Trout Lilies.

Stay on the red trail with the river on your right and the bluffs on your left. This part of the trail is mostly flat and easy except for a few eroded spots. At one point, you will need to turn right down into an old dirt road. When the roadway/trail gets to the river, the trail turns left and begins a gradual climb. There is a red blaze and an arrow at this point so it is easy to find your way.

The trail is fairly steep until it reaches a narrow rock ridge and flattens out through a laurel thicket. When you descend from the ridge, you will rejoin the Forks of the River Trail. Turn to your right. When you get to the Moat Trail (green), turn right on what was the old riverbed.

The trail then climbs steeply to the main trail at the top. There are some showy Fire Pinks and red Wild Columbines along the rocks. This climb is strenuous. Turn right on the main trail heading back towards the museum. If you still have some climbing energy, stop when you get to Step Falls (Little Falls) on the Little Duck River. There is a trail



Fran Wallas

Virginia Bluebells in bloom March-May. These are shown at the meeting of the Little Duck and Big Duck Rivers at Old Stone Fort State Archaeological Area in Manchester.

on the right that goes down to the falls and a great picnic spot on the river rocks. Of course you have to climb back up after your lunch or snack. If your hike ends late in the day, there will probably be deer having their grass snack on the ceremonial enclosure.

All of these trails together are only 4.25 miles, but hiking slowly will give you a chance to experience why this place was so special to the Native Americans.

Directions

Take I-24 to exit 110 and take Highway 53 S. Follow the brown state park sign to Highway 41. Turn right on Highway 41 N and in a short distance you will see the park entrance on your left. Drive on the main park road until it ends at the museum/visitor center.

Old Stone Fort State Park



(Fran Wallas is an avid hiker. She works as an attorney for the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation in Nashville. You can read about her other Great Hikes in Tennessee State Parks at www.tdec.net/greathikes.)

This waterfall, known as Step Falls or Little Falls, is a good place to stop and have a snack as you hike along the Little Duck River at Old Stone Fort State Archaeological Area in Manchester.



Fran Wallas